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PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT



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As this project involved providing experiences for a small number of people, over only a short period of time, it would seem to be presumptuous to draw conclusions on the subject of "Cross-Cultural Involvement". The following report, therefore, is descriptive rather than assumptive. I have included comments on the scheme by people who were involved either deeply or peripherally and have tried to record facts only. This has been difficult in a scheme where emotions and affections played a big part, especially as in re-reading letters and reports written soon after the project took place, I find that most people saw it at that time as an enormous success.

AIMS OF PROJECT

To provide opportunities for Aboriginal families to look at types of employment, living situations, social habits and many sidelights of living in a western culture that are not available in their home locality and which cannot be presented fully through their school. It seemed desirable that this knowledge and experience should be offered to parents, where possible, so that when the time came for a student to decide whether or not to move out of the area for further education or employment, parents could share in the decision making with some knowledge of the situation elsewhere.

We also aimed to provide opportunities for families from Marree to meet families from the northern suburbs of Adelaide so that a friendly type of support may be available to a student or his family who chose to come to Adelaide for a short or long stay.

WHAT WAS DONE

Initial contact was made through the principal of Marree School for the purpose of carrying out the project, because the children from Marree had already stayed with some of the northern suburban families during school excursions. It had been noticed that during these valuable school trips, children had often remarked about their parents' disbelief when they had returned home and described some aspects of city and suburban life. Some of the Aboriginal mothers were working on crafts in the Marree School under the guidance of Mrs Cecily Trueman, so this was made one channel of approach, and extension of their handicraft interest became part of the project.

To encourage involvement and understanding, we provided a variety of experiences, some educational, some merely entertaining, but always with the idea of demonstrating their relevance to day-to-day life in Adelaide. Comments on various activities appear under separate headings under "Program".

As co-ordinators of the project, Betty Tothill and I went to Marree and talked to students and mothers about the program. Most of those that we met at the school made the trip, although the numbers were not as great as we had planned. Eleven adults, including one teacher, and twenty-one children came from Marree. Ten students from grades 6 and 7 at Klemzig Primary School came into camp with us, as did ten mothers from Klemzig and adjacent suburbs. Not all of these mothers were able to stay in camp every night, but their presence was constant during the day and we were able to form family-sized groups fairly naturally. These groups included mixed ages and when an excursion was planned, and even during recreation periods at camp, it was noticeable that people often preferred to remain in their group.

WHERE IT WAS DONE

Shortly before the date chosen for the people to travel down from Marree to Adelaide it was found that Tatachilla Camp was now no longer available to us because of a double booking. I found it extremely difficult to arrange alternative accommodation suitable for the project and within the budget. Morialta Children's Home, now known as Camp Sunshine became available through a cancelled booking, and then alternative arrangements had to be made at short notice for the provision of food for 55 people. It would not have been possible to do this without the human resources of the Association of School Welfare Clubs.

Because of the change of venue from south of Adelaide to a site in the eastern hills, other bus arrangements also had to be made. It was possible to do this with the assistance of the buses of Stradbroke and Croydon Schools, and their drivers, and also teacher-drivers from Morialta High School.

Once these alternative arrangements had been finalised (the most difficult one was the provision of sufficient blankets) the planned program was not unduly affected by the change of locale.

Camp Sunshine is situated on a farm property and the farmer, his animals and his tractor became a focal point for after-hours activities for the children of all ages from both Marree and Klemzig. This was not planned and it was interesting to see some of the shyest children become the boldest during cow-riding sessions and in 'assisting' Mr Rohrlach.

ARRIVAL

We were very conscious of the tension and fear in some of the people after their long train trip from Marree and the bus ride late at night up the steep climb to Morialta. We offered tea, cocoa and biscuits and spent most of the first night rubbing cramped muscles and making more tea. We decided then that a gradual inclusion of the Marree mothers into camp chores, apart from the actual care of their own small children, and into decision-making was advisable, rather than proceeding immediately on to a shared roster system.

INTERACTION

We had no choice but to proceed with the aims of our project by providing as many opportunities as we could for social interaction which meant that we made it easier, when we could, for the shy people to feel comfortable.

Gradually we got to the stage where we could share chores and responsibilities evenly. For instance, when we would all arrive home tired from an excursion, one of the older Marree women might suggest that all of us older ones sit down while the younger ones poured the tea.

This sort of easy acceptance was pleasing to us, but of course, it did not always happen, and it was noticeable that the older Marree people were inclined to withdraw when our program necessitated the inclusion of new people. We believe that the nature of this withdrawal changed, as towards the end of the week spent

in close contact with each other, both Betty and I often felt included in this withdrawal, rather than excluded. I felt this again when I visited Marree some months later.

The teenage children from Marree, on the other hand, obviously enjoyed the company of people who came into our program casually, for example, our sons and husbands, and students and teachers from Morialta High School, whom we had invited to accompany us on the climb up through Morialta Gorge on the first morning of the Camp.

The Marree and Klemzig children in camp reacted fairly predictably, with no apparent problems. Squabbles arose and some of the Marree children occasionally stated that they were "being ganged up on" by the others. Investigation usually showed that there were children from both schools on each side of any argument, with only rare instances of Marree children being excluded from any activity. If this did happen, it was found often to be by their own choice. One mother from Marree who is a teacher-aide at the school and who brought two of her own children to the camp often remarked to us that the Marree children were more active and creative with their leisure time than they were at home where they tended to be less motivated.

PROGRAM

First Day: A bus trip down from Camp Sunshine to the bottom of the Gorge, and then a walk up through the Gorge to a barbecue lunch at the camp was included in the program mainly for orientation purposes, and also to provide informal getting-together situations. We were grateful to students and teachers from Morialta High School for their assistance and because they provided a peer group, in age anyway, for the older students from Marree. These older students were also interested in Simon, a university student, and asked to meet him again. This was arranged.

The older women stayed in camp and we took the opportunity of explaining to them the purpose of the various items in our program. They were extremely interested and became responsive, especially when I explained that I had arranged similar visits for non-Aboriginal parents who lived in isolated places and had difficulty in assisting their children when they had to make a choice about what they would do once they had finished at their local school. We felt their withdrawal, for the first time, when others came into camp to take part in the barbecue.

During the afternoon, the Paper Bag Theatre visited the camp at a reduced charge for a Saturday performance. The Theatre people were delighted by their mixed audience. Response was polite and favourable from our children; more enthusiastic from some of the Marree mothers who obviously enjoyed taking part in the art work.

On the other hand, the bus tour of the city lights was often recalled with excitement although at the time everyone said that they were too tired by the end of the day. Nobody called us that night to rub legs or make tea.

Second Day: This had been planned as Communications Day, but the proposed tour of the Adelaide Airport was not possible, as this had become unavailable on some days. We had known this ahead and had asked Marree people for an alternative suggestion. Football Park was the popular choice as a place heard of often but never seen. We were able to route the bus past the airport, then on to Football Park, and to Semaphore Beach.

Undoubtedly the beach was the most popular experience of all, and the following trip on Showboat up and down the Port River, with its accompanying experiences of large transports loaded with thousands of sheep for the Middle East (from Marree?), the opening of the traffic bridge, the different types of craft and their function (overseas liner, tugs, private sailing boats, etc.) seemed to absorb everyone completely. This was borne out on my later trip to Marree, when the photos of this experience were sought out and discussed by all age groups.

Third Day: The Craft Workshop arranged by the Department of Further Education was valuable and proved enjoyable. Some of the crafts were new to the mothers and students, others were developed beyond the stage that they had reached at Marree. The pottery section was most popular partly due to the personality of the instructor.

The sport and recreation activities arranged by the Physical Education Branch of the Education Department were done with a minimum of fuss, with the instructor travelling from the Upper Murray Region to take part. It could be that this activity, coming so early in our program, was partly responsible for the children's subsequent busy-ness during free periods, as commented upon by the teacher aide and other mothers.

Fourth Day: Craft Workshops continued at the Camp. Small children and mothers who were not interested in crafts, accompanied by Morialta High School students, visited Adelaide Market and then the Adelaide Zoo. The bonds made on these occasions were interesting and have persisted. This has been confirmed by Mike Belnap, teacher from Morialta, and it is likely that because of this contact, school excursions from Morialta in the future may use Marree School as a base.

Introduction to catching buses plying normal M.T.T. routes was part of this day. The catching of an M.T.T. bus from North Terrace out to Stradbroke Primary School was a traumatic experience for us all, and I need not emphasize that it is often the very ordinary everyday experience that city people take for granted that proves quite threatening to people who have never done it before. Each person had the money to purchase a ticket and knew what to ask for. One mother was so concerned and anxious to do it correctly, that when the bus arrived, she left a sleeping child on the footpath.

Gary Atkins, folk singer, who had been engaged for an evening concert, specialised in songs with an outback background that he had composed to recount events and tales of different localities, including districts near Marree. This did not have the appeal that I expected and the children were reluctant to become involved. At no time afterwards did the children refer to the songs as being of any particular interest. On the other hand, a film provided by the South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, which was set in England, proved to be one of the favourite topics of conversation for the rest of the week.

Fifth Day: The various experiences for this day were chosen by people in their small family groups. Most had looked forward to shopping in Departmental Stores (and riding on escalators); museum, art gallery, the library, photographic studios, banks, cafeterias, Adelaide University, office buildings, Government House, Parliament House, were some of the places visited.

Sixth Day: "Troika and the Puppets" at Camp Sunshine provided good opportunities for groups to co-operate in devising and acting and then making puppets. Of all the people that were brought into Camp as part of the program, this group was certainly the most involved. They seemed to find the balance between providing material that was relevant and at the same time different enough to be stimulating.

During the afternoon of this day, one of the suburban mothers, who is a hairdresser, offered advice on hair care and make-up. She cut and styled hair for 30 people. Others shampooed and set hair. There was a great deal of shared excitement with the washing and ironing, and then parading of clothes suitable for dining out. The transformation in some instances was remarkable, and this was valuable interaction.

The dinner was a formal meal with a choice of courses at a city Dining Room. It was a little frightening in some respects but there seemed to be a very close interaction during this whole project, from the dressing up part to the final tour of the Festival Theatre afterwards. Several of the mothers from Marree told me that this was the best part of the trip but didn't say why.

The planned visit to Festival Theatre had to be cancelled and so the older mothers and very young children went home after a short walk through the city by night. Others went to a cinema showing "Gone With the Wind".

Seventh Day: Arnott Motteram and Menz Factory proved that factory work is repetitive but not necessarily dull. Every effort was made by the staff here to fulfil the requirements of our project which needed to include this type of employment.

We were able to walk to Marleston Technical College Art and Craft Centre to demonstrate similar work to that we had been doing at a stage ready for use or sale. The large section on wool was also thought to be relevant. The staff here were most co-operative.

There was a certain amount of nervousness during this part of the afternoon, because we had reached the stage in the program where provision had been made for the Marree people to go to the homes of Adelaide people for the weekend. A great deal of speculation had taken place over this during the whole week, and many questions indicating nervousness had been asked.

We had left all the baggage at the Adelaide Boys High School early in the morning and were to meet there at 3.30 before dispersing to the homes in the suburbs. Lunch was bought at the Marleston Canteen and it was a very depressed group that sat in the lunch shed awaiting the bus to take them to the High School. With what turned out to be lucky foresight we had arranged for the M.T.T. to send their red double-decker bus down to do this. The

sight of the enormous red bus manoeuvring into the small space in front of the lunch shed and completely dominating it, turned out to be one of the hilarious highlights of the trip. It helped to banish the gloom.

WEEKEND VISITS:

This was to be the opportunity for ties to be made or broken. Nineteen Adelaide families were involved in the weekend plan. Most of them were people who had lived in camp, had billeted the children on previous visits, or had joined us at various times so that they all knew each other to some degree before spending the weekend together.

The suburban families had been asked to join in with the project but to adhere to their usual weekend routine. They also took the responsibility of bringing the Marree families in to the train on Monday morning. Outcomes from this weekend are discussed under sub-heading *Family Friendships*.

WHAT WAS ACHIEVED:

Again I emphasize that I avoid drawing conclusions from such a short program, and with such a small sample of people. However, I must record the following aspects of our project and the responses received from the people involved.

Responses during Camp: Some mothers who were inarticulate at first, both at Marree and in Camp, became affectionate and talkative. One mother told me, although not in these words, that the beauty of the surroundings and the variety of things to look at and do in the city made her feel so good that she hadn't once wanted a drink, and that she wanted to come down so that she could look after her children better. She felt that she could do this if she did not drink all day as she said she did at Marree. This mother has since had her children taken from her and placed in a hostel at Oodnadatta. She often said that she liked being able to talk to us. In this regard we often heard the Marree mothers remarking to each other how surprised they were to find that the white people in Adelaide did care a bit about them.

One mother of five children, who has been deserted by her husband, is quite illiterate and inarticulate, but she was able to tell us that she is desperate to get her children out of Marree, which she feels has no future for any of them. This mother does

not drink and is very afraid that her children will soon be doing so in their present circumstances. I feel as desperate as she does that I can do nothing to help her.

Even though friendships were made, it is physically impossible to continue in a practical supportive role without a facilitator or finance.

Family Friendships: Most, but not all, of the families who had Marree adults and their children with them are genuinely keen to take part again in a similar program. Reports from both the Marree people and the Adelaide people indicate that they feel they could continue a friendly relationship.

Ten families billeted children without adults and of these ten, three found the teenagers "too difficult" or "too different" and felt unable to offer any permanent assistance. Two families are keen to offer friendship and holiday accommodation but cannot offer permanent assistance because of lack of room in their homes. They both stated that if they were able to extend their houses they would offer permanent support. The other five families can see themselves as "aunts and uncles" in that they would accept any request made of them to provide a family-type supportive role to any of the children they had staying with them, if those children chose to come to Adelaide for secondary schooling, job hunting or further training.

Immediate Outcomes: The mothers who made the trip had a renewed interest in their craft classes at the school and attended more regularly, the craft teacher reported. They were much more responsive and confident and, interestingly, more friendly towards each other after their trip. However, this was only maintained while she was there to facilitate - pick them up in her car, etc.

This teacher noted a marked wider social awareness in the children and teacher aides who had made the trip. They were eager to talk about the whole range of interests associated with the excursion, and the mothers were able to recount experiences whilst working with their crafts.

Six Months Later: I contacted the suburban families first, and exactly the same number who had offered support immediately after the program were still supportive. Some were still anxious to keep in touch but not sure how to go about it. Most families were willing to offer the mothers short term accommodation for visits or to see their children settled in the city.

I then went to Marree and was embraced on the streets with some tears and laughter as I met the mothers. I was invited into their homes and others sought me out with many small gifts. I was invited to come back "next month".

The children were, predictably, interested in the Camp photos I took back with me; they seemed pleased to see me and were anxious that I should arrange another "trip". I was disappointed that they talked to me personally about their experiences but would "dry up" when I used the tape. Perhaps I erred in that I first attempted to take them in a group and with a teacher present. The teacher was the one who had worked so hard to organise the trip from the Marree end, and who had accompanied them throughout, and I had assumed that this would have made the children more confident to talk.

One of the children who had been very shy and recessive at the beginning of the week in Adelaide and who had become a leader during the week, was very happy with her Adelaide family. Back at Marree she asked me how she could ensure that she got a job so that she could stay with them.

Some teenagers said that they found the program dull and would have liked more entertainment such as dances and music during the week, but they all want to maintain their ties with their billeting families. They asked me how to do this, but seemed to think that it would be difficult. They all wanted the Adelaide families to take over any arrangements. It all seems too hard, but perhaps when the need arises the effort will be made.

SUMMARY

If our aims could be interpreted as "opening up options" and "making opportunities for friendly contacts" the program was successful. If, as the teacher who accompanied the people from Marree saw it, the project was for "cultural exchange", this was not effected. At no time did we, as organisers, envisage this as one of our aims. Perhaps we were wrong in that we did not recognise this as an opportunity for cultural exchange, but my motivation for applying for the grant had come as a result of my assumption that Aboriginal children, similarly to white children living in geographically isolated areas, were distinctly disadvantaged by having parents who shared their isolation.

In looking for supportive services should students wish to move outside their area either temporarily or permanently, it

seemed that cross-cultural understanding and assistance should be one aspect that might be investigated. I was pleased to receive the support of the Aboriginal Education Section of the Education Department of South Australia in this assumption.

It must be understood that the people of Marree are non-tribal, of mixed Aboriginal, white and often Afghan races for several generations and that the future of Marree is not clear as, with the re-routing of the National Railway, it will become a rail terminal instead of a bogey-exchange and victualling centre, thus reducing employment opportunities beyond the present low level. Our project was aimed, therefore, at extending experiences for those students and parents who may, in the future, choose to move from Marree. At no time was it suggested to them that moving away was preferable to staying, or vice versa.

Despite the concern of the teacher who travelled with the group that most of the people made the responses that were expected of them, and therefore evaluation would be difficult, it seems that two facts have emerged -

- a. that progress was made in social awareness and some people from both Marree and Adelaide were able to establish friendly and affectionate relationships which they both wish to continue, and
- b. that to maintain such supportive ties, it is necessary to have a facilitator who is trusted by each group and a certain amount of financial assistance.

With these points in mind, attention is drawn to the apparent success of the Voluntary Resettlement Scheme of New South Wales, which is supported by the New South Wales State Government.*

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* See I. McLeod and D. McNamara: Aboriginal Family Voluntary Resettlement. *The Aboriginal Health Worker* Vol.1 No.2, June 1977.